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How Thirteen Seconds Changed Campus Political Culture in Northeast Ohio

Megan Martinko

HS 491: Senior Thesis

January 10, 2015
To say the 20th Century was a time of broad, sweeping change in America would be an understatement. Despite the positive self-esteem the nation experienced after World War II, the United States began to feel a split-personality: they had to protect their interests abroad while also dealing with their own internal issues that began to emerge. A Cold War was developing between the United States and the spread of communism. The United States suddenly had to deal with the spread of communism on one hand, and Civil Rights and other social issues that were brewing at home on the other. However, the culture of the 1950s and early 1960s kept these issues under wraps due to both “great optimism and great fear.” Yet, toward the end of the decade, cracks were beginning to form. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the United States experienced a cultural and societal phenomenon that was unprecedented in American History. Youth, particularly on college campuses, were increasingly “dropping out” of the mainstream or, what was becoming known as “their parents’ society.” In varying degrees, they rejected previous forms of dress, music, and behavior and moved toward a counterculture that was their own. These young people began questioning their government, their parents, the administration of their universities, and any other authority at which they could point fingers in order to explain the atrocities they found in their worlds. They wanted change, and they wanted it “now!” With the aim of taking center stage in the growing youth movement, college campuses became hotbeds of countercultural activity during the 1960s. Students at institutions such as the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Michigan began participating in countercultural organizations that included the Michigan-bred Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Mobilization

Committee to End the War in Vietnam. Both the Students for a Democratic Society and the Student Mobilization Committee were student activist groups that sponsored campus events to promote an antiwar agenda. They served as a means to cultivate antiwar sentiments on college campuses and spread this message to the rest of society. Through these organizations, young college students became involved in politics, delivered and listened to impassioned speeches, participated in demonstrations, and developed concern for social issues in increasing numbers. And what better time for widespread social movement to exist than in the 1960s—a time of feminism, environmental activism, and the seminal fight for African American civil rights. Society as they knew it was changing, and these students wanted to be a part of this change. The countercultural behavior of 1960s youth was motivated by many factors, but none had as strong an effect as the United States’ involvement in Vietnam.

A lengthy war that drafted, by lottery, young Americans to go and fight in a faraway region of the world—Southeast Asia—the Vietnam War had many factors that made it unpopular with the youth. They had grown up watching their friends, neighbors, peers, and relatives go off to war, many coming back in coffins. Additionally, throughout the spread of much of their lifetimes, the youth had watched the United States continually increase its involvement, presence, and numbers of boots on the ground. By 1967, President Lyndon Baines Johnson had increased the number of American troops in Vietnam to 485,000. As a result of their experiences with the War, American youth felt compelled to fight to end the war in Vietnam. This took place on a national scale, with demonstrations driven by news of each war escalation occurring on college campuses

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2 Ibid., 158-165.
3 Ibid., 182.
nationwide. As each increase was announced, more students became outraged and took greater action. President Richard Nixon’s announcement of the invasion of Cambodia, occurring on April 30, 1970, was no exception.

Kent State University was a perfect example of this rise in antiwar activism. A mid-size public institution located in Kent, Ohio, a small city whose main industry is the University itself, seemed an unlikely place for any antiwar protests to get out of control. However, in the spring of 1970, the unlikely occurred. In early May, 1970, students gathered on Kent State University’s campus to protest President Nixon’s announcement of his decision to invade Cambodia as a escalation of United States’ involvement in Vietnam. After a few days of angry protest, which included the burning of the ROTC building on campus and the blocking of Water Street—a street in Kent known for its bars—Governor Rhodes called in the Ohio National Guard in order to restore order to Kent State University’s campus and the surrounding areas. Then at 12:24PM Monday, May 4th, the National Guard opened fire on a crowd of protestors, killing 4 students and wounding 9 others (See Appendix, Figures 1 and 2). This event stood as a moment of heightened passion and change for the student protest movement that had been brewing throughout the 1960s; after this, the movement exploded and took hold on many college campuses throughout the country. Because some of those killed were protesting America’s recent military incursion in Cambodia, the Kent State shooting reignited the mass anti-government, anti-military, and anti-Vietnam War protest movement that characterized the late 1960s Thus, as a direct result of the shootings, more than four million college students across the nation began to protest. Over 1,300 colleges and

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4 Ibid., 62-77.
universities were affected in some way or another, 536 closed temporarily, and 51 closed for the rest of the academic year.⁶ A unified student movement occurred, fueled by emotions triggered by the shooting. In the wake of the May 4 shooting, mainstream American media, including newspapers, magazines, television broadcasts, and other popular outlets, directly connected the events of that day to America’s ever-escalating war in Vietnam, the growth of its military industrial complex, and the rise of anti-establishment thinking among young people.⁷

In addition to this being an event of national magnitude, it is important to remember that the Kent State shooting held significance for local communities as well. This paper aims to understand the regional significance of the event, examining its effects on student political activity on college campuses within a 100-mile radius of Kent State University.⁸ Were students on these campuses more or less involved in the politically charged landscape of the 1960s? Did local students become more politicized by this event? In this context, the May 4th shooting by the Ohio National Guard on Kent State University student protestors was a key event in 1960s student culture that changed the political atmosphere on college campuses in Northeast Ohio (as well as throughout the country). These changes materialized in varying ways, depending on the environment and student body of each individual campus.

Campus activism changes were evident through an examination of the student-run newspapers published on each campus in the years 1968, 1969, and 1970. These changes

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⁸ Universities examined: Kent State University, Oberlin College, Case Western Reserve University, and John Carroll University.
were evident on campuses such as Kent State University; John Carroll University, a small liberal arts Jesuit institution located 10 miles east of downtown Cleveland; Case Western Reserve University, a small, recently-formed private research institution located in downtown Cleveland; and Oberlin College, a small liberal arts school located approximately 30 miles West of downtown Cleveland. The political atmosphere was transformed in two major ways on these campuses. First, the focus of the movement shifted as a result of the May 4, 1970 shootings. While the focus of the movement was first on a specific, yet faraway and abstract, subject: ending the Vietnam War, it shifted to encompass the lives of students in general, becoming more emotional in nature. Second, the scope of the movement changed. Antiwar activism on college campuses in Northeast Ohio started out as relatively small movements, a hundred or so students gathering to protest. However, after May 4, 1970, these movements grew significantly in size, reaching into the thousands in some cases.

**A Shift in Focus**

The first major shift that occurred in the student political culture on Northeast Ohio college campuses was a changed focus. Before May 4th, student political activity in Northeast Ohio against the Vietnam War was very focused on the abstract idea of the war as something separate from their own existence as students. Their actions focused solely on the goal of ending the war in Vietnam, or ending the very things they believed caused war in general. Students at Case Western Reserve University, for example, involved themselves in Anti-War activities, speaking out against both the Vietnam War and the concept of war in general. The Anti-War movement at Case Western Reserve University took a particular interest in participating in Vietnam Moratorium Days before May 4th. These days, in essence, were a day off from regular schedules during which people were
asked to dedicate themselves to making a statement about the idea of peace in Vietnam to the public. In an editorial in *The Observer* published on October 7, 1970, discussing the upcoming October 15 Moratorium Day, the attitude toward the antiwar movement was larger than just the Vietnam War at Case Western Reserve. The editorial describes the Vietnam war as “a symptom of a basically sick society,” declaring that “people must be convinced of more than just the need to end the war. They must be forced to see the need for change.”

The editorial, written by the editorial board of CWRU students, continues to encourage its readers to participate in the Moratorium, but to focus their efforts on this day to ending “imperialism and repression,” the things it cites as the reasons for the Vietnam War. These words show the complexity of the antiwar movement at Case Western Reserve University, even before May 4th: CWRU students were not only involved in ending the Vietnam War, but ending what they believed caused all wars.

Located approximately 35 miles southeast of Case Western Reserve University, Kent State University students additionally showed their support for the Vietnam Moratorium Days, but, unlike on CWRU’s campus, there were dissenting opinions expressed. In early April, 1970, the Opinion Page of the *Daily Kent Stater* boasted two editorials regarding Kent’s April 1970 Vietnam Moratorium Day, a day that, like previous Moratorium Days, was dedicated to promoting an antiwar message of peace in Vietnam. One is clearly in support of the march, saying, “[The Moratorium Day] will be a reminder to President Nixon that [students] have not forgotten the young men who die each day on the other side of the world.” They claimed that those who supported the war were simply misguided and had clearly not talked to those who had been there. The

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10 Ibid.
editorial declared that democracy would not survive in Vietnam, that “the majority of the Vietnamese do not care what type of government they have.” Students of Kent State felt strongly that their efforts would send a clear antiwar message straight to Washington, D.C. Filled with these convictions, the editorial urged all students to “Support the moratorium… [and] make [their] voice[s] heard at the White House.” Curiously, underneath this piece, a dissenting editorial is written. The opposing viewpoint urges students to take the energy they had been focusing on antiwar protests and put it toward attainable, charitable goals. It argues that the protest’s message has clearly been heard in Washington, D.C. already, and that they should stop “going into the streets and acting like spoiled children” about issues that have had their point belabored. The Daily Kent Stater’s editorial staff explains this discrepancy in its editorial coverage in an editor’s note, which reads,

The Stater Editorial Board has voted to endorse the April moratorium plans at the local and national level. The first editorial which appears in this column represents the majority opinion of that board. The second dissents from that opinion. It is written and signed by News Editor George Sillia.

The sheer fact that one disagreed with the Editorial Board’s majority opinion enough to write a dissenting opinion shows the deeply rooted convictions of both sides of the Vietnam War issue on Kent State’s campus. The issue was so divided, not even the Editorial Board of the Daily Kent Stater, a newspaper designed to represent the Kent State University student body, could put forth a united front regarding it. Regardless of their position, students were still arguing over the issue of the Vietnam War itself—unable to reach a consensus over whether or not the war should end and, if so, how to

12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
take action to stop it. The war in Southeast Asia stood as the primary focus of any Kent
State political activity, whether the students stood against the war or for it.

Approximately 35 miles on the opposite side of CWRU, Oberlin College, a small
liberal arts school in Oberlin, Ohio, also exhibited a clear focus on the antiwar movement
among the student body, this time by boldly declaring antiwar themes as the immediate
goals of their protest efforts. As a reaction to Nixon's announcement involving war
escalations, Oberlin College students gathered on April 31, 1970 to protest the invasion
of Cambodia. An article on the front page of *The Oberlin Review* describes events in
which about 300 students participated in an impromptu march, involving a sit down
protest in a city intersection and a brief takeover of the Cox Administration Building.\(^\text{15}\)
The leadership of an ad hoc committee behind the protests drafted resolutions to be
considered at a special meeting of the General Faculty. These resolutions called for "the
immediate withdrawal of America [sic] troops from Vietnam and the rest of Indochina."
They also stressed, in another resolution, that "if the majority of the faculty and students
of Oberlin College take position on these issues, these constitute institutional stands."\(^\text{16}\)
The committee’s confidence in garnering the support of the Oberlin College community
indicates that at least a significant portion of the institution had similar sentiments to
those listed in the resolutions. As such, the Oberlin College community showed clear
commitment to the anti-war movement and its goals as a primary focus for political
activity of both the student body and the college community as a whole.

Before May 4, 1970, Case Western Reserve University, Kent State University,
and Oberlin College each treated student activism as a way to oppose the war in Vietnam,
as exhibited in their student newspapers. Student activism was present on each campus,

\(^{16}\) Ibid.
with the primary goal of ending the war in Vietnam. Their demonstrations, protests, and editorials expressed antiwar themes relating specifically to the Vietnam War. The universities’ newspapers covered the events on each campus, relating any event specifically to the Vietnam War without much emotional appeal or connection. Until May 4th, 1970, this was the general trend for student activism focus in Northeast Ohio.

However, after hearing of the events on Kent State’s campus, the mood and focus of student political activity on college campuses shifted: it was no longer solely focused on a faraway abstract war. It became personal—very personal. Students on campuses not even 100 miles from their own were killed for being active in the antiwar movement. The proximity of this event increased its salience to Northeast Ohio college students, making it a personal issue for them. At this point, student protests became angrier, realizing that what they were fighting against was no longer a distant concept but was instead taking place on college campuses just like their own. The war in Southeast Asia was not the only thing on which they needed to focus their energy; they were losing their own right there at home. As a result, student political protests focused not only on the Vietnam War, but also on students’ rights on college campuses, sparked by the Kent State Shooting.

Case Western Reserve University made a clear indication that their focus had changed after May 4th, 1970. On May 5th, the front page of The Observer was plastered with articles detailing a gathering of CWRU students to call for a campus strike in an attempt to abolish ROTC on their campus, a call which President Robert Morse refused. During this meeting, which occurred on May 4th, rumors of Kent State’s shooting filtered into discussion, and fueled the antiwar movement’s increasing anger. A sit-down

blockade of Euclid Avenue—an arterial Cleveland road that runs through the campus—resulted, stopping traffic for upwards of two hours. According to an article in *The Observer*, many reasons were given for the sit-in, including “ROTC, the invasion of Cambodia, and the Kent State killings.”\(^{18}\) This was the first time the killing of student protestors was cited as a clear reason for protest on Case Western Reserve’s campus. Student protests from this moment forward still focused on the antiwar cause, but did so with a May 4\(^{th}\) lens, including a secondary cause of concern for students both on their campus and elsewhere.

Student participators in this protest were also very angry upon hearing about the death of their peers. Protest participant Mark Rasenick, President of the University Undergraduate Student Government (UUSG) at Case Western Reserve University, expressed his anger to *The Observer*, saying, “I’m ticked off… People get killed at Kent State and then I go to a meeting and all I hear is rhetoric. I’m frustrated. I’m very, very frustrated.”\(^{19}\) It is clear that, due to elected his position as chief representative of the undergraduate student body, Rasenick’s actions represented the opinions of the majority of the undergraduates on Case Western Reserve’s campus. He expressed the many emotions many students brought into their protests: they wanted to take action, both to promote the antiwar cause they were already loyal to, and to bring meaning to the death of their fellow student protestors. The emotional appeal in Rasenick’s words indicated a clear shift in student activism from focusing solely on the war abroad to the war at home, which was occurring on college campuses throughout the country.

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\(^{19}\) Ibid.
In another instance, Case Western Reserve students erected monuments for the Kent State Students killed in the May 4th shooting. These monuments took the form of tombstones and mock graves for the Kent State victims, with the names of the deceased students prominently etched on the front (see Appendix, figures 3 and 4). By creating tombstones for the students, CWRU antiwar students indicated the personal connection they felt to these students—they felt as though one of their family had died and that these students deserved a proper monument. These monuments were on display in the “People’s Park,” the area between Severance Hall and the Student Union.\(^20\) This was a strategic location because Severance Hall was the site of a major protest in the days following May 4th and Case Western Reserve University was designated as the central location for all downtown Cleveland protests.\(^21\) Both antiwar sympathizers and those still on the fence, would be constantly reminded of students’ lives lost for the antiwar cause. The monuments would thus communicate, to all who passed, the commitment Case Western Reserve’s student body made to the antiwar cause in memory of the deceased Kent State University students.

The student protestors of Oberlin College also indicated a clear shift in their political activity to a stronger commitment to the antiwar cause with a clear remembrance of the deceased Kent State University students and a definite anger toward the perceived injustice that occurred that day. For example, the Friday May 8th issue of *The Oberlin Review* featured a photo on the front page that showed Oberlin students gathering en masse Tuesday around Tappan Square, a park in Oberlin, Ohio, to mourn the loss of the

\(^20\) Photo Inset, *The Case Western Reserve University Observer*, May 12, 1970.
\(^21\) “Students Protest Southeast Asian Involvement,” *The Case Western Reserve University Observer*, May 12, 1970.
four students at Kent State.\textsuperscript{22} The caption says it all: “the largest vigil in years.”\textsuperscript{23} Many students at Oberlin College felt a connection to the students: they were the same age, and were about as politically involved in the antiwar movement.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, they (like much of the nation) were especially shocked and appalled by the news that protestors and innocent bystanders had been shot and killed by the National Guard on Kent State’s campus; they realized, like many students, that it could have easily been them. As Tom Edwards wrote in his Oberlin Review column, “When the students at Kent State were shot, I sat down and did some serious thinking about me and my future… All I’m sure of now is that I’ve got to make an effort to help people’s attitudes toward one another before its too late… This is as good a place to start as any—there are lots of serious problems that must be solved.”\textsuperscript{25} Edwards, like many of his fellow students felt a connection to the Kent State students. Edwards and Oberlin College students like him were more motivated than ever to commit to the student antiwar movement, a cause that was now given a higher sanctity due to the spilling of fellow students’ blood.

Oberlin also showed their support to Kent State University’s cause by offering Kent State students the opportunity to “live, work, and struggle out of Oberlin” after Kent State’s campus was put under martial law and closed.\textsuperscript{26} Aware that many KSU students involved in the antiwar struggle may have warrants for their arrest or an unforgiving, anti-protest community which may keep them from perpetuating their cause, Oberlin

\textsuperscript{22} Photo an Oberlin Review original, taken by Mac Moss.
\textsuperscript{24} Both had participated in Student Mobilization Committee activities and had experienced protests, both on campus and in Cleveland (especially in the antiwar protest that took place at the AT&T Stockholders Meeting in April of 1970—both schools sent participants).
College decided to take action to create a sanctuary for KSU students on their campus. In essence, Kent State University students were unofficially invited onto Oberlin College’s campus in the hopes that Oberlin students would house and feed them, providing them the facilities necessary to continue to promote their cause while withholding any legally-incriminating information in order to protect them from the law.\textsuperscript{27} This was put in place in order to allow the antiwar struggle to continue to strive for its goals, despite the setbacks posed by an environment of hate and intolerance in Kent, Ohio. This invitation, which could have proved to be somewhat of a logistical nightmare for those at Oberlin College depending on the numbers of Kent students and faculty who arrived on Oberlin’s campus, also underscored the Oberlin College community’s commitment to promoting an antiwar cause, additionally motivated by the events on Kent State University’s campus. Some Kent State University students did attend Kent in Exile at Oberlin College and were welcomed with open arms by the Oberlin College community.

In part because of their close association with the event, Kent State University student protestors’ antiwar efforts after May 4, 1970 were likewise supplemented with the fresh memory of the events of May 4 in the protestors’ minds. However, trends that existed on their campuses were in line with other Northeast Ohio universities. Students on Kent State’s campus began to focus on bettering their student experience, emphasizing the importance of the deaths of their fellow students. In the September 1970 Special Registration Issue of the \textit{Daily Kent Stater},\textsuperscript{28} there is much evidence of students working toward rebuilding a solid front on their campus. On the front page, an editorial is published which preaches words of togetherness and unity. It says, “Some of us are

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} The September 1970 Special Registration Issue is the first issue of the \textit{Daily Kent Stater} after May 4, 1970.
looking for peace; others look for hope in the future; still others are searching just to find themselves… Let’s do it together. We must face these problems in a free and open university. Together, man.”

This editorial expresses the general consensus of Kent State University post-May 4th: that all problems (including those regarding peace abroad) should be tackled in a unified front. The Opinion Page of the same issue boasts an illustration of a dove holding an olive branch flying over block letters that spell ‘KSU.’ Following the theme of togetherness mentioned in the editorial on the front page, this illustration shows Kent State’s hope for peace on campus, throughout the nation, and around the world. Kent State students of all political persuasions could unify behind this statement, as they now experienced firsthand the horrors of violence and military involvement. Kent State antiwar protestors were still promoting a message of peace, but were doing so with an added pro-student and pro-Kent State message. It seemed May 4 not only brought the problems abroad home, but it also refocused the energies of the Kent State community to improve what is personal to them—their own campus.

This shift in focus was also illustrated in Kent State’s efforts to memorialize the May 4th incident and to move forward from it. On September 28, 1970, 5,000 individuals packed themselves into a memorial service for the four students killed on May 4th. At this service, Reverend Ralph Abernathy, prominent Civil Rights leader and close companion to Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke, calling for those in attendance to “take up the cause of non-violence and put down war, racism, and exploitation of humanity.”

He said, “The proper way to mourn the passing of the lives of the four who died here… is

no longer to afford the luxury of being a ‘silent majority,’ but to ‘get on the case.’” His message spoke to all those students in the audience, especially those who are new to the antiwar movement, calling them to action in memory of the fallen students. Following this speech, approximately 2,000 students carried out his message by holding a candlelight march from the service to Taylor Hall, the site of the May 4th shooting. At this location, more than a dozen draft cards were burned, reinforcing Kent’s reinvigorated dedication to nonviolent antiwar protest. This protest serves as the perfect illustration of student protestor sentiments on Kent State’s campus after May 4th: it has its roots in the aftermath of the May 4th shooting, using the memory of the shooting to strengthen and reenergize the antiwar movement.

The May 4, 1970 shooting on Kent State University’s campus triggered a shift in the overall tone and focus of the student movement in Northeast Ohio. Students on college campuses throughout the region who were engaged in antiwar protests experienced a new energy in the wake of May 4th. As a result, their focus shifted from protesting against an abstract war in a faraway land to protesting against a more concrete issue on their college campuses. As seen above, they were no longer protesting the deaths of soldiers overseas, but the deaths of their fellow student protestors at home on college campuses similar to theirs. This shift in focus thus reenergized and refocused the student movement for future efforts made with Kent State held in recent memory.

**Increase in Numbers**

Another major shift occurred in student political culture as a result of the shootings on Kent State’s campus on May 4, 1970, one of sheer numbers of student involvement and political activity. Before May 4th, there were occurrences of student

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
activism on college campuses in Northeast Ohio, but the numbers were relatively small, never exceeding, at most, a few hundred of students involved. For example, John Carroll University in University Heights, Ohio exhibited few rumblings of antiwar activity on its campus, except for the voice of student and Carroll News columnist Edward Egnatios in his weekly column, “Notes from the Field,” and even these are small grumbles with little to no indication of the support of other students. For example, in a column published on March 30, 1970, Egnatios opens with a statement voicing his frustrations with disinterested peers: “Open your eyes, John Carroll, there’s a real world out there!”\(^{36}\) Throughout the rest of his column, he reflects on his anger regarding a system that does not serve its constituents, wishing more of “fellow compatriots” would “join in the field” and participate in working to change this system.\(^{37}\) This statement may give extra meaning to his Editorial title, “Notes from The Field.” Egnatios seems to use his column to be the voice of those at John Carroll who otherwise received minimal coverage in pre-May 4\(^{th}\) issues of the Carroll News. Egnatios calls out to the student body, urging them to take matters into their own hands, and serving as the only early-published voice of John Carroll antiwar movement activity.

There were, however, small pockets of antiwar activity on John Carroll’s campus, even though it did not frequent the pages of The Carroll News. In fact, a graduate student from Case Western Reserve University wrote a letter to the editor of his school’s newspaper, wishing their politically interested students could have more information and resources available to them, as John Carroll students seemed to have. He cited the example of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, famous liberal activist and poet, who came to John

\(^{37}\)Ibid.
Carroll the week of a Vietnam Moratorium Day in 1969 to speak and read his poems.\textsuperscript{38} According to this column, John Carroll also invited other notable activists, such as Cesar Chavez and Dick Gregory, to speak on their campus.\textsuperscript{39} One would think that the arrival of such highly acclaimed and well-known people on John Carroll’s campus would receive some attention and coverage in the campus newspaper. However, not a word of mention was written about these events—likely due to overshadowing mainstream conservatism present on campus, which likely would have not supported events such as this and the messages they spread. As a campus newspaper dedicated to representing its audiences’ interests, it is clear that through a lack of coverage of the antiwar movement that this movement was not at the forefront of the majority of its readers’—presumably John Carroll students—minds. Perhaps the omission of Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s visit to John Carroll’s campus was due to a lack of interest in the \textit{Carroll News’} readership or of their editorial staff. Regardless, this is indicative that open dialogue about the antiwar movement was not widely distributed, at least not through the university newspaper.

Other schools in Northeast Ohio exhibited more concrete numbers of antiwar participation before May 4\textsuperscript{th} than John Carroll did, but even these numbers were relatively small. For example, on April 30, 1970, Oberlin College students gathered to protest Nixon’s most recent announcement of Vietnam War escalation into Cambodia. An article in \textit{The Oberlin Review} stated that at its peak, this protest reached approximately 300 students.\textsuperscript{40} Attendance was high enough, in fact, that protestors were able to briefly takeover the University’s administration building, as well as block an intersection in town via a sit down protest for approximately 30 minutes. These numbers indicate that the

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} “Nixon Speech Prompts March, Brief Takeover,” \textit{The Oberlin Review}, May 1, 1970.
antiwar cause was already somewhat of a salient issue for the student body before word of the Kent State Shooting on May 4th had reached the campus.

Case Western Reserve University also showed tangible numbers of participation in the antiwar movement before May 4th, especially in their support of the Vietnam Moratorium Days and the coverage of these events in *The Observer*, Case Western Reserve’s student newspaper. A short editorial penned by the Editorial Staff of *The Observer* regarding the November Moratorium Day was published, saying:

> The importance of the upcoming moratorium and peace demonstrations is self evident. Participate in any way possible. Stay out of class Friday, join activities in Cleveland, go to the demonstration in Washington. Don’t become part of the ‘silent majority.’

Here *The Observer* is very clearly stating its support of the Moratorium day. It encourages readers to set aside their academic commitments and make the Moratorium and working for peace a priority. *The Observer* continued to support the Moratoriums by covering the events of each on the pages of its papers. Its coverage of the November Moratorium includes photographs of the march and extensive descriptions of activities in Washington. It also provides perspectives of Case Western Reserve students who attended the march in Washington, in an attempt to make the Washington march more accessible to all, and to persuade more people to attend future Washington marches.

Case Western Reserve University had sent 400 people from Cleveland to attend the Washington marches; they were likely looking to increase numbers in future events. Through both the paper’s encouragement to attend and participate in Moratorium day events and the numbers it reported with regards to Case Western Reserve students.

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involved in Moratorium day events, *The Observer* indicates a clear commitment, albeit relatively small, to participation in antiwar efforts on behalf of the Case Western Reserve Student body before May 4.

Like other Northeast Ohio schools, Kent State University also experienced quantifiable participation in the antiwar effort before May 4\(^4\). The most notable pre-Cambodia protest occurred at the end of the Spring 1969 semester, when SDS students occupied the Music and Speech building in an attempt to break up the closed University hearings regarding suspended SDS members that were occurring inside. The occupation was a result of a student rally and resulting march to the building, to shouts of “Open it up or shut it down,” and “these buildings are ours.”\(^44\) Upon arrival at the building, SDS students circled the building, and eventually, an estimated 70 to 100 protestors occupied the building. This protest was met with physical resistance, as fistfights broke out between protestors, independent students, and what SDS members labeled as the “Greeks.”\(^45\) Also, on May 20, 1969, 25 members of the Students for a Democratic society and their allies assembled on the campus Commons in an attempt to thwart Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) drills. These students viewed the ROTC program as one of many tools that the United States was using to repress their citizens and fit them for the war-machine-like society that produced the Vietnam War. While the demonstration ultimately failed, it gathered many onlookers, about 200 or so, who longed to watch the spectacle that was the SDS on their campus.\(^46\) SDS actions were making an increasing impression on Kent State’s campus, and were gaining both followers and enemies. While,

\(^45\) The *Daily Kent Stater* notes, however, that according to the Kappa Sigma fraternity president, the Greek Presidents had met previously and voted not to participate in any action at the Music and Speech building.
ultimately, any antiwar political participation was only a small portion of the student body before the May 4th shooting on their campus, there were still strong indications that the antiwar cause was relevant to at least a portion of the Kent State University student body. Kent State experienced moments of antiwar activism on its campus before May 4th, but none of these moments gathered more than 100-200 protestors.

While all of this evidence indicates some form of participation in the antiwar struggle pre-May 4th, these numbers changed dramatically—increasing from hundreds to thousands in some cases—as a result of the Kent State Shooting. On college campuses throughout Northeast Ohio, there were significant growths in the numbers by which students participated in the antiwar movement. The increased participation was exhibited in a variety of formats, whether it be through an increase in discussion in the school newspaper or through an increase in concrete numbers of participation in demonstrations both on campus and throughout the country.

In the case of John Carroll University, a school that did not have much political participation indicated in its school newspaper prior to May 4th, the increase in participation and interest took the form of additional columns and more political dialogue published in The Carroll News. In the first issue of the 1970-1971 school year, two columns appear side by side that both discuss these students, one honoring those working together and another referring to them as “crazies.” 47 Unsurprisingly, Edward Egnatios was back for another year of supporting the student movement on John Carroll’s campus. His column discusses the “pluralistic ways of working and living for the same means,” and preaches a message of tolerance and understanding. 48 Like the students of Kent State, Egnatios is realizing that togetherness is the only way to move forward; both liberal and

conservative students must be tolerant and should attempt to understand the other side of the debate, so all students can form a unified movement toward a better tomorrow. However, it is clear that not all students felt such a way: the opposing argument, expressed in Jim Genova’s editorial, “‘Crazies’ on Campus,” bemoans the movement toward what some students see as a better society. Genova writes that the basic consideration of compromise “has been overridden by the New Left ‘crazies’ in favor of the new law of violent dissent, which is making it increasingly impossible for people to come together on college campuses across the nation.” As a result, according to Genova, the concept of a free academic society has been lost, muddled by the politicized actions of New Left student movements. The Carroll News finally seemed to serve as a voice for opinions of both sides of the spectrum, giving attention to a politicized issue that had nearly been ignored entirely before May 4, 1970. Regardless of the clear division of ideology amongst John Carroll’s student body with regards to the antiwar issue, it is important to note that a significant change in The Carroll News’ treatment of this issue occurred, allowing for larger amounts of student body discussion and participation in the issue.

Oberlin College, who had already indicated solid numbers of antiwar activity, experienced a significant increase in student demonstration participation after May 4th. In greater numbers than before, Oberlin College students were involving themselves in antiwar protests throughout the country. On May 7th and 8th, Oberlin College sent approximately 500 students to participate in the thousands of students marching in

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50 Given additional time and resources, I would dive into the Western Reserve Historical Society’s archives in an attempt to find more information about John Carroll University’s antiwar activism, since The Carroll News does not seem to have covered the issue in depth. I would also consider conducting oral interviews of those who were professors, students, and administrators on John Carroll’s campus during this time.
Columbus, Ohio and Washington, D.C. By May 11th, the number in Washington, D.C. increased to over 1000 Oberlin College students, who joined the estimated 100,000 students gathering on the National Mall. In a prior demonstration, as mentioned above, Oberlin College student participation only reached 300. The increase as a result of May 4th from 300 to 500, and then ultimately to 1000 is numerically significant. While before, students may have only involved themselves in antiwar protest activities on campus, they were now, in large numbers, going outside of their community boundaries to band together with their fellow students to protest the Vietnam War.

Like Oberlin College, Kent State University experienced a significant increase in the numbers by which students participated in antiwar demonstrations. As mentioned previously, Kent State University held a memorial service for the four students killed on May 4th, which attracted a crowd of over 5,000 individuals. This memorial evolved into a demonstration, during which 2,000 students held a candlelight march to the site of the May 4th shooting, where more than a dozen draft cards were burned. These numbers were a significant increases from any previous demonstration, which could only gather the attention and support of, at most, a few hundred. It is evident, through these increases as a result of May 4th, that the event had a significant role in growing student protest participation numbers on Kent State University’s campus, a trend that was consistent on campuses throughout Northeast Ohio.

As a result of the shooting at Kent State University on May 4, 1970, numbers of participation in student activism grew significantly. Before May 4th, students participated

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51 “Hundreds Depart for Columbus, DC Rallies,” _The Oberlin Review_, May 8, 1970.
54 Ibid.
in antiwar events on Northeast Ohio college campuses, but only in relatively small numbers (on average, no more than 100-200). John Carroll, Kent State, and Oberlin College all experienced significant changes in numbers of participation after May 4th, with numbers increasing anywhere from double what was previously recorded (in the case of John Carroll), up to ten times that number (in the case of Oberlin College). It is clear, through an analysis of sheer numbers, that the events on Kent State’s campus on May 4, 1970 had a significant impact on the number of students participating in antiwar activism on college campuses.

**Conclusion**

May 4, 1970 stands as a day that impacted not only the Kent State University community, but also the culture of college students at large, especially those of Northeast Ohio. Four students were killed on Kent State University’s campus that day in a reaction to student antiwar protests and riots that had developed on their campus. Certainly, it is a day that will live on forever in the memory of Kent State University students, faculty, and staff. Monuments have been erected, a museum has been established, and courses surrounding the issue have been designed and taught. Although plenty of local attention is given to the event, especially by those that lived it, a larger cultural theme emerged that transcended Kent, Ohio’s borders—one that can only be truly understood through the different perspective of one who is objectively removed from the event. Through this objective vision, it is clear that the legacy of May 4th stands, not only as the subject of monuments, poems, songs, museum displays, and historical research, but also as an event which changed both the focus and breadth of student protest activity on college campuses.
There are even broader implications to consider as a result of this research. Kent State University students in 1970 were simply attending college, some with a greater focus on the antiwar movement than others, “sheltered” by the bounds of their time as an undergraduate student on Kent State’s campus from the “real world” that loomed around them. When the National Guard opened fire on student protestors on May 4th, there emerged a dramatic intersection of the real world and the real horrors of war on a college campus setting. Students who had been protesting against the violence and oppression of war were suddenly met with that which they were fighting, in their own, once safe realm. As a result, the nation as a whole was called to consider the significance of what was previously understood as trivial: students’ words, thoughts, and actions. Four students had lost their lives in the fight to end the war in Vietnam. Does this give their words and actions more validity, as they were willing to give their lives for their cause? Is this heightened validity as a result of the loss of lives what caused the collegiate community to react in the way they did? Should it have taken the loss of lives for any widespread action to transpire?

Questions such as these circulate even today, 45 years later, as people continue to process and heal from the Vietnam era, attempting to understand how to weave such a difficult period into United States history. Historians everywhere make an effort to objectively understand this period using degrees of separation in order to understand the broader significance of the era. As we approach the 45th anniversary of May 4, 1970, in a year that has been full of protests and riots with regards to race, it seems we are still dealing with the legacy of May 4th as a nation. Major protest events such as that which occurred in Ferguson, Missouri, Cleveland, Ohio, and, more recently, Baltimore,
Maryland, call us to consider, yet again, what brings together people in the act of protest and riot. What will it take for this generation to take action? What will be the tipping point that causes the nation as a whole to take action to resolve the ills of society today?
Appendix

Figure 1: This photo, taken by John Filo, is famous for its capture of Mary Ann Vecchio kneeling over Jeffrey Miller’s body after he was shot by the National Guard on May 4, 1970. This image was taken from the front page of The Plain Dealer, May 5, 1970.

Figure 2: This photo, taken by John Filo, depicts the National Guard aiming at student protestors, May 4, 1970. This image was taken from the May 5, 1970 issue of The Plain Dealer.

Figure 3: An example of a mock tombstone for the four students killed during the May 4th shooting. Inscribed: Allison Krause, Sandy Lee Scheuer, Jeffrey Miller, and William Schroeder. This image appeared in the May 12 issue of Case Western Reserve University’s The Observer.

Figure 4: Students of Case Western Reserve University visit the monuments dedicated to the May 4th victims in the People’s Park. This image appeared in the May 12 issue of Case Western Reserve University’s The Observer.

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